

For a "Greater Colorado River"



GRAND CANYON NATIONAL PARK
Photo by H. C. Taylor - Courtesy of the National Park Service



ON THE COLORADO RIVER

JOHN DICKINSON SHERMAN.
The Colorado river is one of the great rivers of the United States. A joint resolution of congress proposes a "Greater Colorado." This is to be done by adding 423 miles of stream. This addition is to be accomplished by changing to Colorado the name of the Grand river from its source near Rocky Mountain National park in northern Colorado to its junction with the Green river in southeastern Utah. The Grand and Green rivers together make the Colorado river.

The Grand is 423 miles long from its source to its junction with the Green. Eighty miles of this stream's length is in Utah. The Green rises just south of Yellowstone National park in northwestern Wyoming and is 700 miles long to its junction with the Grand. The Colorado, from Utah to the Gulf of California, is 1,000 miles long.

Though the Green is nearly twice as long as the Grand, the Grand carries the greater volume of water. Moreover, the Green runs 35 miles through the northwestern corner of Colorado and receives much of its volume from Colorado. It is, therefore, contended by Colorado that the Grand is the real upper Colorado and that the Green is a tributary.

It is the people of Colorado who are behind the joint resolution for the change of name. With them it appears to be a matter of deep sentiment. Representative E. T. Taylor of Colorado, speaking to the joint resolution, said:

"Mr. Speaker, for the past 35 years my home has been and is now in the beautiful little city of Glenwood Springs, Colo., on the banks of what has heretofore been called the Grand river, the principal tributary and, in fact, the main stream of the Colorado river, and during all those years I have always hoped and believed that sometime the state pride of the sons and daughters of our beloved commonwealth would bring about the change of the name of that stream to its rightful name, as the source and principal part of that wonderful river, and permit our citizens to fondly and proudly welcome the greatest river in our state as our great state's stream under the name that is dearest to every Coloradan heart. And with the passage of this resolution that hope of many years, not only of my own, but thousands of other Coloradans, will be consummated."

At its last session the Colorado legislature passed a bill officially changing the name of the Grand from Grand to Colorado, within the state boundaries. A bill was introduced in the Utah legislature at the last session to change the name of the Grand from Grand to Colorado within the boundaries of Utah. The Utah legislature did not act on the bill and will not meet again for two years.

In the meantime, inasmuch as the Colorado is an interstate and international stream and is classed as navigable, it has been decided that the change in name should be brought about by act of congress rather than by action of the states. Moreover, the Colorado bulks large in the public eye just now as a national river of tremendous importance. Already water power and irrigation projects of great importance—the Imperial valley in California, for example—mark the course of the river. Projects under discussion are apparently of still greater importance—the proposed Boulder dam across the Colorado just below the Grand canyon, for instance. This project may be undertaken by the federal government. It would be the most spectacular work of its kind in the world and would cost anywhere between forty and seventy-five millions.

The Colorado is a mighty river beyond doubt. Many rivers unite to form it. The principal branches of the Green are the Uinta, Price, Yampa and White; of the Grand, the Eagle, Roaring Fork, Gunnison and Dolores; of the Colorado, the Fremont, Escalante, Paria, Kanab and Virgin on the right and the San Juan, Little Colorado, Bill Williams and Gila on the left. The Grand canyon is on the main river in Arizona and extends from the mouth of the Little Colorado to the Grand Wash. The Grand Canyon National park encloses 217 miles of the river, which in places is 6,000 feet below the rim of the canyon. The lower Colorado runs through a low desert country. At Yuma, on the Mexican line, is an immense irrigation project which consists of a diversion dam nearly a mile long, 400 miles of canals and 70 miles of dikes and cost about \$5,000,000. The water is carried to Arizona lands by a thousand-foot tunnel, which passes under the river.

Below Yuma the river, when in flood, inundates large areas lying below sea level. In 1905 the floods enlarged the 50-foot intake of the Imperial valley (California) irrigation canal in Mexico territory to 2,000 feet. It poured all its waters through this break, and its regular channel to the Gulf of California went dry. This break was not successfully closed until 1906-07. Floods again threatened to inundate the Imperial valley and in 1909-10 a congressional appropriation of \$1,000,000 was applied to the construction of levees and dikes. The waters of the Colorado here run in a huge aqueduct, which the river has built up for itself from silt. This aqueduct cut the part to the north off from the Gulf of California. Evaporation has left only the Salton sea, which is salt and below sea level.

An interesting feature of the discussion of the joint resolution was the bringing out of the history of the Colorado river and the early American Southwest in concise and accurate form. This was set forth in a report furnished by George Otis Smith, director of the geological survey on the history of the naming of the Colorado, Grand and Green rivers and of the state of Colorado. This report explains how the Colorado came to bear no less than nine names between 1540 and 1776. It also sets forth how the Green river came to be known as the "Ghost river" to geographers. Among the facts brought out are these:

It was the Coronado expedition of 1540-42, sent out by Viceroy Mendoza, that first explored the pueblo country of New Mexico and Arizona and the Great Plains as far northeast as central Kansas and discovered the Colorado river and the Grand canyon. Alarcon discovered the Colorado at its mouth and gave it the name of Rio de Buena Guia (good guide) because that was Mendoza's "device." Diaz, traveling along the river, saw the Indians carrying burning brands with which to warm themselves; so he named it Rio del Tizon (firebrand). Cardenas discovered the Colorado at the Grand canyon, but for some reason refrained from naming it, probably because soon afterward it was identified with the Rio del Tizon. So the Coronado expedition gave the Colorado its two first names.

The Coronado expedition was disappointing and it was not until 1581 that an expedition under Rodriguez revisited the region. This revived interest in the conquering and settling of New Mexico.

The contract for the conquest and settlement was finally awarded in 1595 to Juan de Onate, who was made governor, adelantado and captain general of the province of New Mexico. In 1598, Onate reached the Santa Fe region with an army and a colony of 400 men, of whom 130 had his families. Onate ruled New Mexico until 1605. By 1605 he and his subordinates had reexplored practically all the ground covered by Coronado and opened new trails. In 1604 he made a journey from Santa Fe, his headquarters near Santa Fe, to the head of the Gulf of California. He went by way of Zuni, Moqui and Williams river to the Colorado and down the east bank of that river to the gulf. Crossing the Colorado Chiquito, or Little Colorado "10 leagues" southwest of Moqui, he named it "Rio Colorado." . . . because the water is nearly red." Be it noted that the name "Colorado" is here given for the first time, not to the Colorado river but to one of its branches, the Little Colorado. To the Colorado itself, Onate gave the name "Rio Grande de Buena Esperanza" (good hope).

At some indefinite time during the next hundred years the name Colorado was transferred from the Little Colorado to the main river, and before the end of the century had been pretty well established. Father Kino, the great Piman apostle, 1683-1711, uses the name freely, as he does the alternative name Rio del Norte; and he even bestows upon it a new name, Rio de los Apostoles.

A revolt of the Pueblo Indians in 1680 resulted in the entire evacuation of New Mexico by the Spaniards until its reconquest by Vargas in 1692-94, when most of the missions were reestablished also. San Diego, the first of the California missions, was established in 1769; and in the next 36 years 17 others had been established, dotting the coast from San Diego to San Francisco bay.

Father Silvestre Velez de Escalante, then stationed at the Zuni mission, spent eight days at Moqui in June, 1775, trying to discover whether there was an Indian trail across the Grand canyon. He failed to extract any information from the Indians and concluded that the canyon was impassable. In a letter on the subject written to Father Garcia August 18, 1775, he called the river or the canyon Rio Grande de los Cosmos. The Cosma (Havasupai) Indians were settled on Cataract creek. The next year, 1776, Garcia himself traveled from Mohave to Moqui, and went

into the Grand canyon at the bend below the Little Colorado on June 26. He named the canyon Puerto de Bucareli (Bucareli's pass) in honor of the then viceroy.

Grand river, both above and below its junction with Gunnison river, was named Rio San Rafael by Fathers Dominguez and Escalante in 1776. To the south branch, the present Gunnison river, they gave the name Rio San Javier (Xavier) and reported the Ute Indian name as Tonlehi. In this area Pike's maps, 1805-07, like other early maps, are difficult to interpret. His "Rio de los Animas" (his Animas) is much more like Grand river than his "Rio San Rafael." In 1843 Fremont lettered it Grand river, as did Captain Stansbury in 1849.

But for long years the maps showed great diversity of nomenclature. Below its junction with the Gunnison, this river was usually called Grand river, rarely Rio Colorado or Grand and even Colorado. Above the junction it was called Grand, Bunkum, Blue and North Fork of Grand river. Gunnison river was named variously Eagle, Eagle Tail, South Fork of Grand, Grande and Grand river.

In after years Captain Gunnison's name became gradually fixed on the branch which he explored, and the name Grand on the north or main branch, while the name Blue river now describes a small south branch of the latter in Summit county, Colorado.

Green river was called Rio de San Buenaventura by Dominguez and Escalante in 1776, and Escalante says (Diario, Sept. 17, 1776), that it was so named in 1703 by Fr. Alonso de Posada. Thinking that it flowed to the west, the map makers represented it as crossing the Great basin and flowing into the Pacific ocean. This it was that the River Buenaventura became the famous "ghost river," which for years haunted the maps of the far West. Pike, 1805-07, mapped it with headwaters in the position of upper Green river, having an affluent, Rio de San Clemente (Escalante's name for White river, an east branch of the Green river), and flowing southwest into Sevier lake (nameless). Before 1811, however, upper Green river was known to be connected with the Colorado. The Astorians called it both Spanish river and Colorado river. It was called Rio Colorado by Jedediah S. Smith in 1824 and Rio Colorado by the West by William H. Ashley in 1825. Bonneville, 1837, lettered it Colorado of the West on his map of the territory west of the Rocky Mountains.

The name Green river dates at least as far back as 1824. Dale refers to a news item in the Missouri Intelligencer, June 25, 1825, of a party leaving Santa Cruz in November, 1824, to trap on "Green river." Fremont says that the Spaniards, contrasting "its timbered shores and green wooded islands with its dry sandy plains," named it Rio Verde (Green river); Bancroft speaks of an employee of Ashley's, "Mr. Green who gave his name to Green river"; and Chittenden advances the theory that the name may have been suggested by the color of the water.

The act of congress providing for the organization of the territory of Colorado was approved February 28, 1861. As introduced and as passed by the house, the bill named the proposed new organization the territory of Idaho—"Idaho" having been selected from many names proposed. In the senate, on motion of Senator Wilson of Massachusetts, the name of the territory was amended by striking out "Idaho" and inserting "Colorado." This was done at the suggestion of Delegate Williams, for the reason that the Colorado river arose in its mountains, hence there was a peculiar fitness in the name. Bancroft, however, says that "The name Colorado was given to it at the suggestion of the man (William Gilpin) selected for its first governor"; and he quotes from a manuscript of Gilpin's as follows: "Some wanted it called Jefferson, some Arcadia. I said the people have to a great extent named the states after the great rivers of the country, and the great feature of that country is the great Colorado river. 'Ah,' said he (Wilson of Massachusetts), 'that is it'; and he named it Colorado."

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